

Identifying your landing area – and visualising the ball running to the hole from that point on the green – is the tour player's secret to getting up and down. And you will immediately simplify your chipping strategy if you follow their example

The professional touch



There is nothing more satisfying than surveying a chip shot, identifying a safe landing area within a yard or two of the edge of the green, and then selecting the club that lands the ball on that point for it to check and roll out like a putt toward the flag. It's a skill that can save you a handful of shots in a round of golf – and one that can be practised and honed in a relatively short time.

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By Jeremy Dale

PHOTOGRAPHY: MATTHEW HARRIS
SHOT ON LOCATION AT WOBURN GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

Size it all up – the lie determines the club

The first thing you have to consider on just about every shot is the lie of the ball – if you get unlucky around the green and find your ball is in thick rough or an old divot you are pretty much forced into taking a lofted club and using a fairly steep angle of attack to get the ball up and out – and your expectations have to be adjusted accordingly. But assuming a half-decent lie, you have options – and the key is to identify the club that simplifies the shot as far as possible. The art of choosing the right club boils down to practice and experience to understand how the varying loft through the irons will affect flight and roll. But here's a basic guide:

- **7 iron – one third flight, two thirds roll**
- **9 iron – half flight, half roll**
- **Sand wedge – two thirds flight, one third roll**

Once you have decided the landing point and selected a club then make a practice swing to get a feel for the shot. Remember, your job is to hit to the landing point so focus your attention on this point and not on the flag. Trust your decision is correct. If the shot lands accurately with the right flight, it will go close.

Practice tip: As I am doing here, if you get the chance to work around a green, place a towel a couple of yards onto the surface and focus on landing the ball on that point – it's that control over landing distance that counts.



Use your experience and judgment to visualise how the ball will react upon landing – identify your landing area and focus your attention there, not on the flag



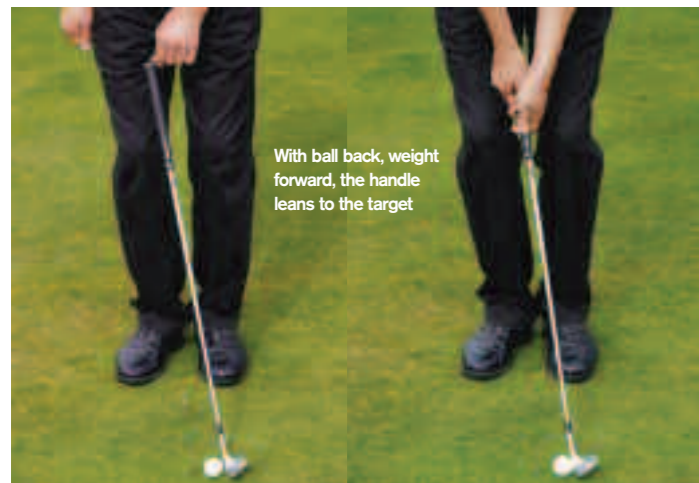


With your feet together, you want to feel that you settle the majority of your weight on your forward foot, leaning gently toward the target. Your body centre is then nicely ahead of the ball, which is played opposite the rear toe

Now here's a challenge: having completed your set-up position, you should be able to lift your rear foot up off the ground and support your body on your forward leg. This actually creates a terrific drill – try hitting a few shots and experience the sensation of pinching the ball off the turf with a descending strike



A useful mantra to helping you achieve a good set-up position for the regular chip shot is: *“Ball back, hands forward, weight forward”*. Repeat that as you place your feet comfortably together to create your stance and settle your body with your weight favouring the forward foot. Playing the ball opposite the inside of the back heel, the clubshaft will lean gently toward the target as you allow your arms to hang and make a good grip. Essentially, you have pre-set a good impact position, one you will find and repeat consistently if you allow the stroke to be governed by the movement of the upper body, hands passive (right)



With ball back, weight forward, the handle leans to the target



Having pre-set impact, keeping your hands passive as the upper body controls the motion will see the hands lead the clubhead through the ball – perfect

Basic chipping technique

– how to pre-set a good impact position

To impart the controlling backspin you are looking for on a basic greenside chip shot (indeed on any iron approach shot from, say, the 6-iron and down) your goal is to take ball-then-turf – i.e. good technique sees the clubhead meet the ball with a slightly *descending* blow. In a full swing the dynamics at work – as you shift your weight away from and then towards the target – enable you to achieve this without thinking about it, and you will see most good players remove a shallow divot with their iron shots. But when it comes to the short game, there is simply not the time nor the significant body action to transfer weight onto the forward foot to create that downward strike – and so you have to pre-set the conditions of impact at address.

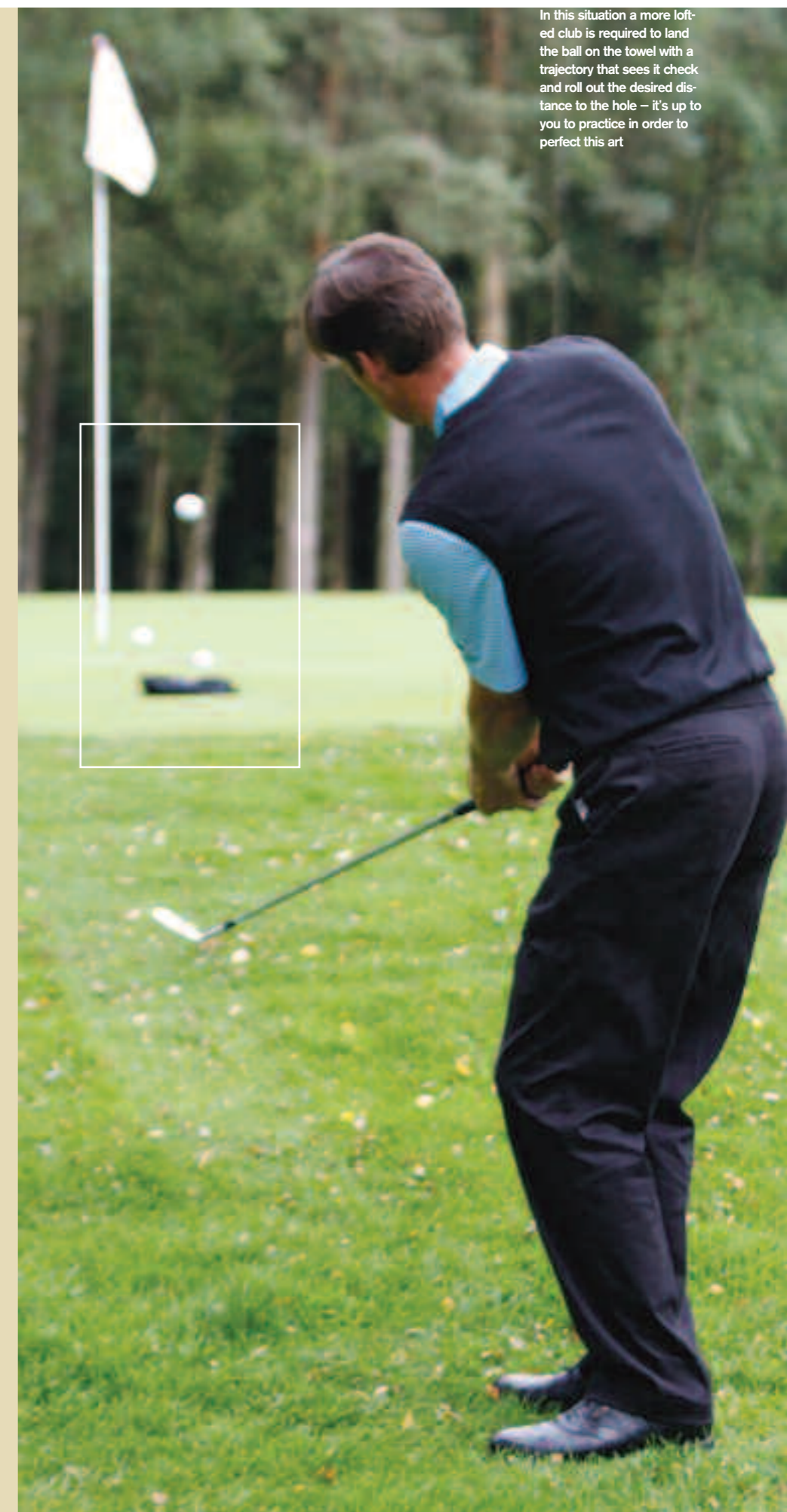
Here are the key checkpoints to follow:

- *Adopt a comfortably narrow stance* – this is surprisingly important, as it reduces leg action and helps to place the onus for control on the shoulders and upper body. (It is not like putting where the legs must remain still).
- *Play the ball opposite inside of back heel* – this is where the club will make contact with the ground when you make a good chipping swing. So that's exactly where we play the ball in order to enjoy taking the ball first before bruising the turf. (If you tend to hit the ground first then check your ball is not too far forward in your stance).
- *Hands fall opposite inside of front leg* – this ensures the shaft is set at the correct angle. You want the hands to be slightly ahead of the clubhead at address – just as they should be at impact. If they start in the correct place, then there is no need to compensate during the swing.
- *Weight favours the front foot* – a ratio of 65:35 is ideal. Again, you want your weight on your front foot at impact, so it makes sense to place it there in readiness at the set up. The swing is too short for a significant weight transfer so it needs to be “pre-set” at address. During the chipping swing keep the weight on this foot to ensure a downward strike and good contact.
- *Head just in front of the ball* – unlike most full shots the head position with a chip is actually ahead of the ball. If you lean back to get your head behind the ball it puts your weight onto the back foot and this can cause you to hit the ground first.

Passive hands, active shoulders

Clearly, a chip shot does not require any great power and is played with a relatively short swing and passive hands. Using your wrists increases clubhead speed – which may be desirable in certain situations, but not in the playing of a basic chip shot. With the motion generated by the shoulders, the arms and the club work *together*, and the ball can be clipped forward with positive acceleration.

The most important swing key is the path the club takes during the shot. The backswing and follow-through are mirror images – what you do on one side you need to repeat on the other. The benefit of a mirror image path in chipping is that you will bruise the turf at the same point every time, giving you the benefit of a consistent strike on the ball.



In this situation a more lofted club is required to land the ball on the towel with a trajectory that sees it check and roll out the desired distance to the hole – it's up to you to practice in order to perfect this art